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‘Come unto me . . .’

AN INVITATION IS something everyone receives at some point in their lifetime. Weddings, birthday parties and many other functions may only be attended by those fortunate people who have been invited. To receive an invitation and then fail to attend, without offering an explanation, is an insult to the host. Normally the host will have a list of people to invite should any member of the original guests indicate their inability to attend.

We have an invitation to consider. It is unique and was issued by God's only begotten son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who said:

‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’¹

He was speaking to his fellow countrymen in the land of Israel. This was not an invitation to a few hours' enjoyment which would soon be forgotten, but it would provide long-term benefits for the recipients, culminating in eternal life.

THE RECIPIENTS OF THE INVITATION

The people who heard Jesus speak were beset with similar problems to twentieth century men and women. They possessed the same human nature, and they had to work for their living. Their nature was sinful, inherited from Adam, the father of the human race. They would live their allotted span on earth and then death would claim them. God said to Adam:

‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’²

Life in Israel was extremely arduous for some in the first century AD. Many were slaves whose masters were tyrants. Others toiled long hours under the burning sun in the fields and vineyards. There were many beggars, most of whom had

¹Matthew 11. 28 ²Genesis 3. 19

disabilities which made them unfit for work. There was no welfare state to ease their burdens!

Others were rich and enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle, being waited on by their slaves or hired servants. There was much class distinction amongst the Israelites, God's chosen people. The rich were unable to escape mankind's ultimate punishment, death, and for the most part despised Jesus and his message. Jesus said to his disciples:

'How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'³

(The eye of a needle probably refers to a gate in Jerusalem which was too small for a camel to go through.)

JESUS PREACHED TO THE POOR

Jesus invited those to follow him who felt utter fatigue from their hard labour, those who were groaning under the burden of Roman tyranny. The Jews were looking for their Messiah, their prince who was to come as leader or anointed one. Jesus Christ means *Jesus anointed*.

At the time of the birth of Jesus the angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds:

'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'⁴

Jesus came to his people and the majority of them failed to recognise him. They expected a mighty king to come and release them from Roman oppression. Israel were the custodians of God's word which was read frequently in the synagogues; they offered many sacrifices of lambs without blemish, pointing forward to the sacrifice of Jesus. When, however, the true lamb of God came, he went unrecognised, showing how few actually read the Scriptures with understanding.

Before a man or woman could accept the invitation of Jesus to follow him they had to recognise him. John the Baptist looked on Jesus and said, '*Behold the Lamb of God!*'⁵ John's statement was heard by two disciples, one of whom was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

'He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.'⁶

Andrew and Simon Peter, along with ten other men, were disciples (or trained ones) of Jesus. They learnt to be like Jesus by their association with him. They had

³Mark 10. 24, 25 ⁴Luke 2. 10, 11 ⁵John 1. 36 ⁶John 1. 41

faith that the kingdom of God would be set up on earth at the time appointed by God and that Jesus would be king of Israel and the whole world. They were also poor in spirit, or humble, and recognised that all they had, came from God. They learnt their humility from their Lord and Master, Jesus. On occasions they forgot their humility and lost their faith due to the frailty of their human nature and Jesus taught them a profound lesson:

'He that is least among you all, the same shall be great.'⁷

What is faith? This question is answered by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

This is what the ancients were commended for.'⁸

THE WAY TO GOD

The only way for man or woman to become reconciled to God is through Jesus. It is necessary to follow the example of the disciples and become a 'Christian', to accept Jesus Christ as our leader and learn from his example. Jesus said to Thomas:

'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'⁹

The Bible is available to all who wish to read it. The invitation of Jesus to come unto him is as powerful today as it was when he spoke nearly twenty centuries ago. It is impossible for people to find God in their own way.

The Almighty Creator of heaven and earth has absolute power over His creatures. The majority of men and women today wish to lead their lives in a manner which is convenient to themselves. They do not wish to admit a responsibility to a God who requires their lives to conform to His commandments if they are to gain His grace, or unmerited favour. They think that if they help their neighbours and lead a good life by human standards, they will earn any reward which may be offered by God in the future. These are on the broad way that leads to destruction. Jesus said:

'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'¹⁰

Jesus opened the gate that leads to life, and only by following him can members of the human race gain salvation today.

It may not at first appeal to the man in the street to have Divine constraints placed on his lifestyle, but a study of God's word will reveal benefits to be obtained in the present life from coming to Jesus. Those servants of Jesus who remain faithful to him until the end of their lives will receive God's gift of eternal life.

⁷Luke 9. 48 ⁸Hebrews 11. 1 (N.I.V.) ⁹John 14. 6 ¹⁰Matthew 7. 14

BENEFITS IN THIS LIFE

The 1980s are an age of anxiety. Mankind is facing unprecedented environmental problems. There is pollution by chemicals such as weedkillers and pesticides. The 'safe' disposal of nuclear waste is causing grave concern worldwide. The air is being polluted by the burning of fossil fuels and exhaust emission from automobiles, causing ACID RAIN to fall and destroy the world's plant life and pollute the lakes and rivers. The diminishing ozone layer is the current point of discussion and cause of alarm.

The leaders of the human race have shown themselves to be irresponsible with the earth's resources, who do not mind pursuing any course of action that will result in short-term profit. Now they are becoming embroiled in the effects of policies which were instituted at the industrial revolution.

The priority is to find a solution to these mounting environmental problems. Can men succeed in solving them? The Bible answer is not encouraging. The prophet Jeremiah said:

'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.'¹¹

This was demonstrated in the Garden of Eden when Adam disobeyed God. He was unable to obey one simple commandment. His descendants are no better, being self-willed and arrogant. Man will not solve these problems by any of his initiatives.

Those who have accepted the invitation of Jesus to '*Come unto me*' have no worries over the world's environmental problems. The solution is with Almighty God. The earth will not be destroyed, because God has said through Solomon, king of Israel:

'One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.'¹²

This answers another twentieth century worry. The growing nuclear arsenal being built up by the Superpowers will not be unleashed and destroy the world. This planet is firmly in divine control. The evil which is in the world is a consequence of man's sins and his failure to honour God. Those who come to God through Jesus enjoy peace of mind now.

THE FUTURE REWARD

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans:

'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'¹³

¹¹Jeremiah 10. 23- ¹²Ecclesiastes 1. 4 ¹³Romans 6. 23

Not a life full of sorrow, tears and pain, but a life of joy with all life's trials a thing of the past. The gift will be perfection of existence to live in God's kingdom with the faithful of all ages, those who have loved God and kept His laws.

Jesus will soon return to this earth and there will be great joy among those who have followed him faithfully. Jesus said in his Revelation to the apostle John:

'And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.'¹⁴

Today the nations are angry; they are destroying the earth and God is about to intervene to save it. It is therefore vital that all who read the invitation of Jesus should come to him. Those who do will receive peace of mind now and eternal life when Jesus returns. Those who reject the invitation will show that they are enemies of Jesus. The lot of the unbelieving rejectors of Divine grace will be eternal death when the wrath of Almighty God is poured on the wicked by Jesus. This dreadful punishment will be final and irreversible.

We leave you to choose your destiny. Either come to Jesus, follow him faithfully, have peace of mind now and ultimately live for ever; or spurn the invitation and pass into eternal oblivion.

Your actions will demonstrate which alternative appeals to you!

J. Gaunt
Welling

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

The bright sunlight streaming through the trees soon after dawn in the English countryside will remind many Christians of a verse in the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi spoke of the trouble that would come upon the earth just before the return of Jesus to establish God's kingdom. Malachi then said that for those who revered the Almighty, the sun of righteousness would arise with healing in its beams and they would be able to rejoice just like animals that had been released after being penned up. Look at the passage at the beginning of Malachi chapter 4.

The daily miracle of dawn should make all of us pray for that day as Jesus taught his disciples, *'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven'*.

Matthew 6. 10

¹⁴Revelation 11. 18

Israel in Bible prophecy



THERE IS NO need today to draw attention to the importance of the influence of the State of Israel in world affairs. The events of the past months have only served to emphasise the strength of this modern entrant into the political scene. Most people today do not question her presence as remarkable because she has been a power in her own right all their lives. But in the context of long-term world history, it is very remarkable and a knowledge of the way in which she reached her present position is important to an understanding of current world problems and the way in which events are likely to move in the future.

A NATION OF DESTINY

The Bible throws very important light on this significant development. A glance back at the political structure in the area around the turn of the present century, compared with the present, emphasises the enormous changes in the balance of power which have occurred over that period. In itself this may not be regarded as unusual because the world political scene is always changing. But the entrance of Israel onto the scene has introduced a new element into world politics. She especially is a nation of destiny. Her recent rise and development were clearly foretold in the Bible and have been expected by Bible students for centuries. One example must suffice:

There is, then, a partial and primary restoration of Jews before the manifestation, which is to serve as the nucleus, or basis, of future operations in the restoration of the rest of the tribes after he has appeared in the kingdom. The pre-adventual colonization of Palestine will be on purely political principles; and the Jewish colonists will return in unbelief of the Messiahship of Jesus, and of the truth as it is in him. They will emigrate

thither as agriculturists and traders, in the hope of ultimately establishing their commonwealth, but more immediately of getting rich in silver and gold by commerce with India, and in cattle and goods by their industry at home under the efficient protection of the British power... Now any person acquainted with the present insecure condition of Palestine under the Ottoman dominion must be satisfied from the testimony, that some other power friendly to Israel must then have become paramount over the land, which is able to guarantee protection to them, and to put the surrounding tribes in fear. This is all that is needed, namely, security for life and property, and Palestine would be as eligible for Jewish emigration as the United States have proved for the Gentiles.'

Elpis Israel—John Thomas, 1849

Following the scattering throughout the world of the Jews after the overthrow of Jerusalem in AD 70, there seemed little prospect that they would ever again influence the area known for so long as Palestine, still less that they would be reconstituted as a power sufficiently influential as to make other nations think first before attempting to force an issue in the area without her agreement.

During that long interval of some 1,900 years, experiencing almost continuous bitter persecution, the Jews survived and retained their identity as a people. It is a phenomenon which has exercised the minds of thoughtful people for generations. The famous comment by Mark Twain, written in 1899, is only a specimen of many: 'All things are mortal but the Jew. All other forces pass but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?'

However, the Bible had answered that question long before:

'Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.'

Their scattering was caused not because the Romans could not tolerate their presence in Palestine but because of their disobedience to God's commands. The Roman power was used by Providence to carry out that work. The reason goes much deeper than a political power game.

Even before the nations entered the land under Joshua, the extreme suffering they would undergo during that scattering was foretold by their leader Moses:

'And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind:

Jeremiah 30. 11

And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.²

The truth of these words is written on the pages of their subsequent history and especially from AD 70 down to this century. Yet all attempts of the persecutors to exterminate them have failed, however carefully plans were laid, and will continue to fail. In modern times, Adolf Hitler thought he could do it; he understood the psychology of most Gentile minds and used his knowledge to the full. The following is an extract from his writings:

'You will see how little time we shall need in order to upset the ideas and criteria of the whole world simply and purely by attacking Jewry. It is beyond question the most important weapon in my propaganda arsenal and almost everywhere of deadly efficiency.'

But awful as Jewry's experiences in consequence of that policy were, Hitler failed to exterminate them. He is dead and the Jew is still here, and here as a self-governing state with a land to call their own. Once more the Bible was proved correct. That very persecution, the echoes of which have not yet subsided, gave the additional impetus needed to the Jewish efforts to return to the land of their forefathers.

As the dreadful cruelties the Jews were to experience over the centuries were foretold in the Bible, so was their eventual regrouping and settlement.

'Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'³

'Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen (nations), whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.'⁴



*Emblem of the State of Israel:
Seven-branched candlestick
between olive branches*



*Badge identifying a Jew
(‘Jude’) under Nazi oppression*

²Deuteronomy 28. 64-67 ³Ezekiel 11.17 ⁴Ezekiel 37. 21

So it is happening today. Bearing in mind that these statements in the Bible are at least 2,500 years old, there is a very remarkable witness to its truth and reliability. God said of Israel, '*Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God*'.⁵ To shut our eyes to this remarkable evidence in the world today is also to shut our eyes to what the future holds.

THE ORIGIN OF THE JEWS

The question now arises, for what purpose has their regathering and the setting up of the Jewish state occurred? To answer this question it is necessary to look back briefly at the origin of the Jews. They can trace their origin to Abraham, a man to whom God made important promises. The record in Genesis reads as follows:

'Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.'⁶

At that time Abraham lived in a place called Ur in Mesopotamia. He obeyed that call and went. He eventually arrived in the land of Canaan where that promise was renewed with more details given of what was involved:

'And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.'⁷

Here was the clear promise to Abraham that he would eventually inherit that land with his seed, or descendant, for ever. That promise was made approximately 1600 BC. It was renewed to his son Isaac and to his grandson Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons through whom came the twelve tribes of Israel. The family increased and after a period of oppression in Egypt, they wandered through the wilderness of Sinai, eventually settling in the land of Canaan. There they became a powerful kingdom with the capital in Jerusalem. The nation was God's chosen people and they were the kingdom of God. Their two great kings, David and Solomon, sat on the throne of the Lord over Israel. David said:

'And of all my sons, (for the Lord hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.'⁸

⁵Isaiah 43. 12 ⁶Genesis 12. 1-3 ⁷Genesis 13. 14-17 ⁸I Chronicles 28. 5

NATIONAL FAILURE

But their ability to remain in that land as a kingdom did not depend on their armed forces, although they were required to make the effort to defend themselves; it depended on their obedience to God's commands. Their destiny has been controlled. As God's people they have been chosen for the development of His purpose with the earth. To their shame they fell away and in consequence the Kingdom was overthrown and they were scattered exactly as Moses had said. But that was not to be the final end of the Kingdom of Israel.

The Bible tells us what would happen. The following words were spoken to their last king, Zedekiah:

'And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.'⁹

The one 'whose right it is' is Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (See the first verse of Matthew's Gospel record.) He is the 'seed' or descendant promised to Abraham.

'Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.'¹⁰

THE KING OF THE JEWS

If the Bible can be relied upon, and evidence has already been given to show that its prophecies of Israel's scattering and regathering cannot be contradicted, can the return of Jesus to the earth to take over the control of the Jewish state and turn it into a Kingdom be expected? Logically the answer must be 'yes'. It is also the answer to the question posed earlier, namely, for what purpose is the regathering taking place?

This may seem to be a wild assertion, but based on the evidence of the past and the present, it must be what is yet to occur. It throws light on the present world situation.

There are other facts in the Bible record which have a bearing on the scene. Before Jesus suffered his cruel death of crucifixion, he and his disciples sat together on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. Spread out before them across the valley of Kidron was the city and the temple. Some had spoken to him of the temple building in terms of adulation. It undoubtedly was very beautiful. But his reaction surprised them. He said:

'As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'¹¹

⁹Ezekiel 21. 25-27. ¹⁰Galatians 3. 16 ¹¹Luke 21. 6

Staggered by this statement, they enquired when this would take place and what sign there would be of his coming. In Matthew chapter 24 and Luke chapter 21 is the full account of his words. Here are a few relevant extracts:

'And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out: and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.'¹²

These words were fulfilled at the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans. How long was the city to be in other hands?

SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

In the New Testament these words are recorded:

'And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.'¹³

A limit was put on the period, '*until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*'. To confirm the meaning of his words he told a parable:

'And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.'¹⁴

In the Bible the fig tree is a figure used to represent Israel and as the shooting forth of her leaves heralds summer, so the sprouting out of the nation of Israel after nearly 2,000 years of scattering through the world is a sign of the return of Christ to the earth. The kingdom of God mentioned in the quotation is the literal kingdom of Israel which is to be restored when Jesus returns as the king '*whose right it is*'.

Over the past 40 years there have been many countries which have obtained their independence, becoming world powers in their own right. In nearly every case the people already lived in the land; they had their cities, their roads, a developed land and an established form of government. The transfer therefore was not too difficult. This, however, was not the way Israel developed. The people were scattered throughout the world with different languages, customs and ways of life. They took over a land which was poor and largely unproductive. Everyone knows how modern, efficient and enterprising that country is today. Furthermore they have revived their own language and nearly all the population speaks it, whereas in

¹²Luke 21. 20-23 ¹³Luke 21. 24 ¹⁴Luke 21. 29-31

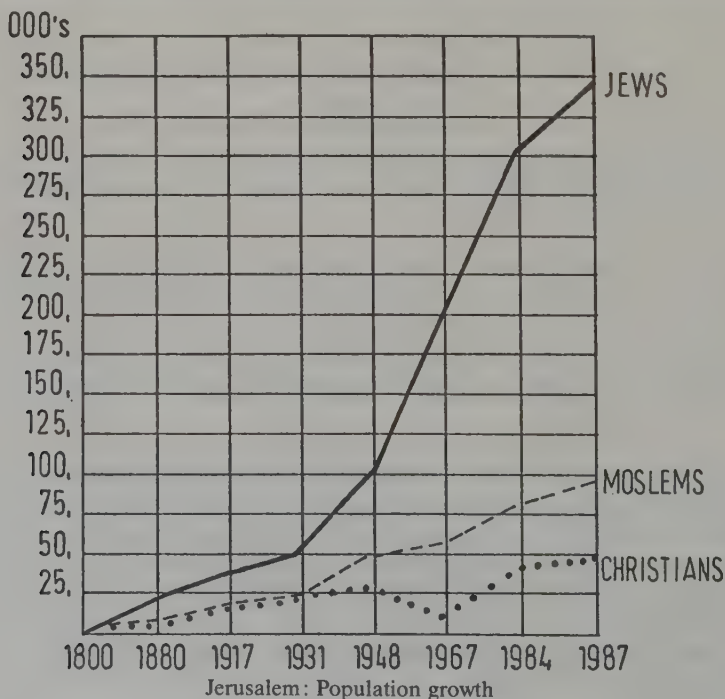
many other countries which have recently acquired independence, the difficulty of many languages still remains as an impediment to integration. It is a modern miracle which can only be explained satisfactorily by accepting the Bible account of its background.

ISRAEL'S FUTURE

Israel today is at the centre of one of the most difficult international problems. The eyes of all the developed countries are focused on her. Jerusalem, the centre of the Government of Israel is the most sensitive spot in that problem. Jesus taught us not to swear by Jerusalem *'for it is the city of the great King'*.⁵ Of all the cities in modern Israel this is the one where in recent years the population of Jews has increased dramatically.

Whatever the feelings of any other modern nation today about Jerusalem, it has an important role to fulfil. No effort to overthrow God's purpose with it will succeed in the long term. The prophet who foretold that although persecuted the Jew would always survive, spoke also of the future of Jerusalem:

'And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the



⁵Matthew 5. 35



Emblem of
United Jerusalem

Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.¹⁶

It is an almost unbelievable picture, but so is the history of the Jews. This is the day for which true Christians long and pray. The evidence of the past and the present provide the assurance that eventually this will be the role of that remarkable city. Hence the Psalmist urged:

'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.'¹⁷

J. C. Wharton
Dulwich

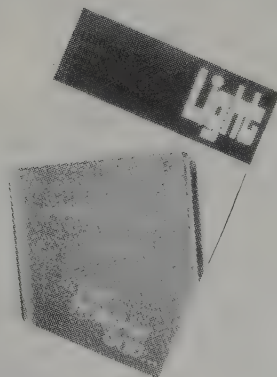
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¹⁶Jeremiah 3. 16, 17 ¹⁷Psalms 122. 6, 7

Christianity alone

WHERE IS THE world going? What will be the outcome of the distress and turmoil that we see on every side? The media bombards us with problems. We see the evidence of pollution in the world's seas and in the depletion of the ozone layer in the heavens. Can it be stopped or will human greed and the short-term expediency of governments prevail?

Sometimes we see a ray of hope in an international accord on one problem, only for the media to turn to another problem. There is no shortage of bad news. There seems to be too many people for the world's resources. Even if a small country has its population under control, the teeming millions of Africa, India and China are all bringing their demands to the horizon. Is it fair to deny the high standards of living of the 'advanced' countries to the underprivileged many of the third world? On the other hand, to do so seems beyond the limited resources of this planet and beyond the tolerance of the environment to absorb such activity.

These are the problems that beset the world. The politicians love to endlessly discuss the pros and cons but the sceptic wonders, do they speak from ignorance or from some platform of self-interest? WHO DO WE BELIEVE? TO WHOM DO WE TURN?

Some people think the Royal Family are to be admired and the advice of Prince Charles sometimes makes sense of a confusion of opinions. However, the Bible states:

'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.'¹

In any case, to be a prince or a pauper is surely only an accident of birth and the greatest of kings ever known recognised this fact. It was Solomon who wrote:

'Folly is set in great dignity . . . I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.'²

¹*Psalm 146. 3, 4* ²*Ecclesiastes 10. 6, 7*

We live in a secular society in which state education and religion are separated and although the UK is supposed to be a Christian country, we cannot rely on the Crown or the government to stick to religious principles.

SCIENCE, RELIGION OR STATE?

To whom then do we turn for answers? There is no shortage of people willing to pose as experts. The politicians of the state shout their opinions on the screen and in the press but only a fool would expect truth and reason from such a discordant babble.

The religious leaders of today are not afraid to voice political opinions. They get their envoys involved in political affairs and they try to speak with the authority of their position. More often than not they speak to the wind. Their desire to pander to an immoral society has left the Christian standards derelict. Their lack of moral conviction is reflected in their empty churches. Even those minority religions with apparently fervent followers seem to only repeat mindless dogmas, at variance with the tenets of the faith they profess.

It is no wonder that most people turn to science for a technical fix to the world's problems. We have put men on the moon, and transplanted human organs. We have worldwide instant communication and unbelievable computational powers. Why not look to the scientist to unlock the secrets of life and death? This approach, on which many an agnostic leans, is a fundamental misunderstanding of what science is and what it can do. Science asks the question 'What exists?' Even after it has spent all the world's wealth on research, it will never answer the question 'Why do we exist?' And that is the fundamental problem of mankind. We need a reason for living. We need a strong motivation to relinquish our natural inclination for selfish greed that is at the basis of all the world's problems.

So the world faces a moral crisis. The answer to its problems lies totally in the realm of religion. It is only to God that we can look. Immediately we hear the cynic say 'To which God shall I look; the worst evils done by men are perpetrated in the name of religion'. It is true. We need a religion we can trust and this booklet claims that 'Christianity alone' can fulfil man's need for guidance. That is quite a claim, considering the plethora of religions we see, or even the many so-called Christian sects. How do we choose the right religion? WHAT IS THE CRITICAL CRITERION FOR TRUTH?

RELIGION OR PHILOSOPHY?

Throughout history there have been men of ideas. Some have changed the world and the way people think. We think of Buddha who conceived the 'wholeness' of creation. In fact we are only beginning to realise that all life is inter-

related and that destruction of a species, or pollution or destruction of one part of the world—like the Brazilian forests—affects all men. Many people have been motivated to live less selfish lives by the thoughts of the great philosophers, like Confucious and Buddha. Then there are the revolutionary ideas of Plato, that made the Greeks the foremost nation in culture and mathematics. His ideas about planetary motion and the involvement of immortal beings in the heavens changed the world view. It was not until Copernicus and Newton that men got away from the Greek myths. It is now accepted that planetary motion follows the Newtonian Laws of Physics and does not involve angelic motors. But even Newton's ideas have now been replaced by the Relativistic Theories of Einstein.

We only have to read about the marvellous ideas of men to appreciate their ingenuity. The imagination and curiosity of men have no bounds. But we also see that science stands on shifting sand. Today's laws are tomorrow's approximations. Science does not lead to absolute Truth nor does human philosophy stand the passage of time. We need more than ideas and ideals.

THE WAY FORWARD NEEDS TRUTH

The Bible claims to be a revelation from God. THE GOD. The only source of Truth in its absolute sense must be the Creator of all things. Only God knows the purpose of life. Only He can show us the way to go.

Not only does the Bible declare the word of God but it holds out an invitation to man to find out God's purpose and plan.

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet recorded:

'Thus saith the Lord . . . Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands.'³

'I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'⁴

That is quite a claim and quite an invitation. If it can be substantiated, why don't we see the leaders of the Christian churches advising the government on their future plans with the Bible as their guide?

Perhaps at one time that situation was a possibility but now we see the leaders of the churches in disarray. We find bishops denying the fundamentals laid down by God. We find the man-made ideas of Plato insidiously added to the Scriptural principles. We find clerics trying so hard to be all things to all people that they turn churches into social clubs and they do not think it matters any more what people believe. No wonder we see the obscenity of Roman Catholics and Protestants bombing each other—and both claiming to be followers of Christ.

³Isaiah 45. 11 ⁴Isaiah 46. 9, 10

'THY WORD IS TRUTH'

Let us turn aside from the quarrels of the world leaders, whether they be priest or politician or pundit, and let us look at the Bible itself. There are two criteria for Truth. TRUTH IS CONSISTENT, AND TRUTH IS PREDICTIVE. No scientific theory is acceptable without these two criteria being fulfilled. That is why the search for scientific theories is unending.

If the Bible is the word of God, it will be consistent in its message. An immortal being will not change His ideas or be inconsistent in His approach. If the Bible is the Word of God, then what it claims WILL come to pass. This should be true in the things that happen in our lives consequent on our actions and this will be true of prophetic statements made by God about the future. So we have three things to look for: 'consistency', 'prophecy' and 'direction for our lives'. If we find these three, then not only do we know the Bible is the Word of God but we know the answer to man's problems and WE KNOW where we are going.

IS THE BIBLE CONSISTENT?

The Bible is in some sense a history book. Its writings cover the history of man from the creation, and the history of the Jewish nation from their beginning. As it describes the dealings between many men and God, there are plenty of examples to study. We could, for example, enquire if God expected the same from Adam, Abraham and Christ himself. That would also be a good start into understanding what God requires of us.

God put Adam in the garden of Eden and gave him all that he needed. He also gave him instruction so we see at once that God did not create the world and then sit back and see what would happen. He did not let it evolve. He is interactive, communicative and instructive, and that in itself is a reason for looking to God for our answers. God expected obedience from Adam. What God said was true, but Adam did not believe that he would die. In the lie of the serpent—'*Ye shall not surely die*'⁵—we are reminded of the many sects that put forward the same false idea that man is immortal, and has a soul that continues after death. We can immediately reject those religions which follow the myths of Plato, not God. This criterion for Truth is most selective as the immortal soul is the most prevalent of wrong doctrines and that includes such ideas as reincarnation. All repeat the lie of the serpent. But Adam failed to recognise the truth of God's word and he disobeyed. The result was death, something that even the most hedonistic people have to eventually face.

The consistency of the Bible can be seen in God's dealings with Abraham. In contrast to Adam, Abraham believed God. So great was the faith in God of this man that he is referred to as the '*father of the faithful*'. When God gave him, in his old age, the son Isaac for which he longed, we see Abraham willing to sacrifice his son at God's

⁵Genesis 3. 4

command. Such faith and obedience is hard to comprehend. Of course it prefigured the example of Christ and we see this in Abraham's statement to his son *'My son, God will provide himself a lamb'*.⁶

The consideration of the repetitive patterns called types are themselves evidence of consistency, but for the moment we can recognise that the obedience of Abraham was what made him a *'friend of God'*.

Thirdly we can consider Jesus Christ himself. He also believed explicitly what God told him. The writer to the Hebrews explains:

*'Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.'*⁷

Many people have asked: why was it necessary for Christ to die? Why is there evil and suffering in the world? If we consider the Bible as a whole, we can see that God requires faith and obedience before He will make His children perfect. Perfection through suffering is a part of the Divine plan for reconciliation of His creation to Himself.

These few examples are just a brief look at the consistency of the Bible message. This is a hallmark of Truth that no other writings can claim to such a degree. What about 'predictive' power?

IS IT PREDICTIVE?

The reference that we made in Isaiah chapter 46 (reference 4) showed that God alone can tell the future. The prophets were given this power to prove that they came from God. The prophecies in the Bible are numerous. They vary from the course of history over thousands of years, such as Daniel chapter 2, to predictions that took place almost immediately, Genesis chapter 24. 14-19. The prophecies were about individuals, about towns like Tyre and Babylon, about nations like Israel and about empires like Greece and Rome. Many of these are given in detail in the special issue of 'Light on Prophecy' but let us just refer to a few that we can recognise as having occurred in our own lifetime, that were predicted 2,000 or more years ago. We refer of course to the re-establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 against all odds—prophesied by Ezekiel in chapter 37 as well as by other prophets. The people of Israel are indeed referred to as God's witnesses. Secondly, Christ himself prophesied that before his return to the earth the nations would be in turmoil (Luke chapter 21. 25) and would be characterised by violence and homosexuality.

In addition to this, Christ prophesied:

'For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so also shall the Son of man be in his day. But

⁶Genesis 22. 8 ⁷Hebrews 5. 8, 9

first he must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.⁸

This prophecy is particularly interesting in that the first part has already happened—when Christ died. The rest must occur before he is to come again and no one would deny that the world today shows the violence of the times of Noah and the sins of the people of Sodom to an increasing degree.

THE ANSWERS

So the Bible is consistent and predictive. That it is also instructive in terms of giving us a way to live, commandments to follow⁹ and opportunities to obey like Abraham, is without question.

The Bible is unquestionably Truth. Not only does it fulfil the requirements and stand up to searching enquiry about it, but it tells us much more. It tells us of God's purpose with the earth:

'For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.'¹⁰

It tells us that there will be a time in the future that the kingdom which Jesus preached about will be established and all the world will be full of the knowledge and glory of God. Not only that, it offers to each of us an opportunity to take part in that purpose. God is creative and communicative and instructive. Here are the answers to man's search for direction and to know where he is going.

SUBJUGATION TO GOD

When these things are so evident and the Bible is so widely available, why is it not followed by everyone? Why don't governments look to the Bible for pointers, the way that archaeologists have learnt to do? Why do so many sects attach to God's words a mixture of myths and ideas that clearly are man made?

The answer of course lies in the nature of man. Man is self-centred and egotistic. To believe and obey is the opposite of the natural instincts of men to be selfish, greedy and opinionated. Subjugation to the will of God is the opposite of the pleasure-seeking hedonism, the man glorifying Humanism or the divisive

⁸Luke 17. 24-30 ⁹Matthew 5 ¹⁰Isaiah 45. 18

Feminism that we hear so much about. To please God requires belief, obedience, patience and humility, and these characteristics are rare and not easily developed. The Lord who created all things has said:

'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.'¹¹

No one who trembles at the word of God in the Bible will follow the short-term expediency of human activity. No one who has read God's word will be impressed by human philosophy or man-made religions. No one who learns about the all-wise Almighty God will follow books that contradict what God has said, or will seek to add to or subtract from God's revelation.

CHRISTIANITY ALONE

God has stated that there is only one God and there is only one way to approach Him:

'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'¹²

Similarly the singleness of God demands that there is only one purpose with the world—His—and there is only one way to live and that is in accordance with His will.

There is no point in having faith in political ideology or in scientific technology. There is no point in following the wrong ideas of philosophers or revering the written works of men who are not in agreement with the Word of God. There is only ONE WAY and that Way is Christ Jesus into whose death and resurrection we need to be baptised if we are to be saved from the consequence of our mortality:

'There is . . . One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all.'¹³

This exclusivity of Christianity is both a blessing and a relief. There are not many ways to work out your destiny, as some men believe. Having found THE way, there is no reason to look for another.

Thomas, the doubting disciple, asked Jesus '*How can we know the way?*'¹⁴ The reply of Jesus is the answer to all men's problems and the reason why, in Christianity alone, is there hope for mankind:

'Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'¹⁵

'If ye love me, keep my commandments.'¹⁶

R. Griffiths
Hartley

¹¹Isaiah 66. 2
¹⁶John 14. 15

¹²I Timothy 2. 5

¹³Ephesians 4. 4-6

¹⁴John 14. 5

¹⁵John 14. 6